

2. ABORIGINAL CULTURE

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The brief outline of the aboriginal culture of the Mundurucu which follows is based chiefly on traditional knowledge and the memories of informants, supplemented by the writer's observation of those features which are extant. Only slight reference has been made to historical sources due to their relative unreliability and also because of the absence of data in them on the socio-economic organization, which is our major interest in this work. This section does not pretend to be an ethnography of the Mundurucu, but will be focused on the delineation of the basis of Mundurucu socio-cultural integration. It will thus provide a baseline for the study of Mundurucu culture change.

The Economy

The Mundurucu are essentially forest dwellers.

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Although their aboriginal villages are located on high savannas at the headwaters of the eastern tributaries of the Tapajós River, they depended on the resources of the forests and rivers for their subsistence. Their economy did not differ greatly from that of other Tropical Forest

e Because Mundurucu culture has suffered considerable attrition and because this culture loss has been felt in varying degrees in different areas of modern occupation, it is expedient to use the past tense throughout this chapter. It should be remembered that many traits still exist, especially those outside the realm of warfare and ceremonial. The later chapter on the contemporary Mundurucu will indicate what is now present or absent.

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105 tribes except in varying emphasis on different pursuits.

Hunting, fishing, gathering, and gardening were and still are the basis of Mundurucu life.

Hunting

224 Of these four activities hunting and horticulture contributed more to the food supply than the other two. To the Mundurucu man, the proper daily activity was the hunt. The men were tireless and enthusiastic hunters and prized game more than any other food. Hunting, in aboriginal times, was done exclusively with bows and arrows and simple traps. The principal animals hunted were tapir (Tapirus Americanus), both the wild pig (Tayassu albigrostris) and peccary (Tayassu taassu), several species of deer, the peca (Cuniculus peca Ags.), monkeys, and birds. Wild pig is the most abundant source of game food in the Tapajós region. The men enjoyed hunting, but this must not obscure the fact that it is extremely exhausting work. The hunters left the village in the morning shortly after dawn and traveled long miles through the forests and across sun baked savannah before raising the tracks or scent of game. There then followed an arduous pursuit that sometimes lasted for hours. The successful hunter often ended his day by carrying a 100 pound wild pig on his back for three hours on the homeward trail to the village. Occasionally, he had to spend the night in the forest if he made his kill too late to return by daylight. The men hunted nearly every fair day except for those happy occasions when a great quantity of game was brought back to the village. All activity then stopped and the people sat around eating the

Tabular ComparisonMo
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1. Pre-rubber

Village consists of men's house, matrilineal extended family households; population divided into patrilineal clans and moieties. Village males form collective hunting and garden-clearing group. Household females form the horticultural unit. Intensive warfare for headhunting and as mercenaries allied to whites; partial dispersal of villagers in dry season for fishing and war. Chief the war leader and representative of village in trade of manioc flour.

2. Marginal involvement

Chief continues as mediator with trader, but is now often trader-appointed--trader gains influence. Dry season population dispersal for rubber production rather than fishing and war--war continues, but lessened in importance. Basic pre-rubber economy and settlement pattern unchanged. Continuing displacement of aboriginal crafts.

3. Transitional

Further displacement of native crafts, increased need of trade goods, increased dependence on trader. Chieftainship undermined due to new type chiefs who now represent the trader. Agricultural cycle and village life inhibit larger rubber production. Trend toward individual trade.

4. Convergence and culmination

A. Intermediate

Move to new villages in rubber regions. Chief now intermediary with Indian agent and missionaries. Individual trade, individualized subsistence economy--end of men's house and traditional village--

1. Pre-fur

Nomadic composite band hunts large migratory game animals. Frequent band breakup during winter scarcity. Amalgamation of several winter groups for summer hunting and fish-fishing. Chieftainship weak and shifting--leader of winter group; no summer band chief. Residence bilocal, frequent shifts of winter group membership.

2. Marginal involvement

Trade by family heads--leaders do not trade for followers. Trapping secondary to subsistence hunting--subsistence still gotten traditionally, basic social patterns persist. No trapping territory. Linkage to trading posts.

3. Transitional

Further displacement of native crafts, increased need of trade goods, increased dependence on trader. Increased fur production interferes with subsistence hunting. Individual trade conflicts with group solidarity.

4. Convergence and culmination

Fur trapping now predominant; winter provisions purchased. Winter groups not necessary with end of collective hunt--family or individual hunting gives greater efficiency, allows conservation. Shift of economic interdependencies from group to trader.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND CULTURAL CHANGE

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Mundurucu
(cont.)

village held together only by weakening kin ties and sociability. Centripetal factors (e.g., sorcery, sexual rivalry) cause fission of these villages and results in B, below.

B. Dispersal (follows upon 3 or 4A) Leadership no longer integrative. Individual trade undercuts kin obligations.

Conflict with agricultural cycle resolved by moving to rubber avenue--family now in isolation except for trade bonds.

Montagnais
(cont.)

Emergence of a chief who serves as intermediary with Indian agents and missionaries.

Nuclear family basic unit at all times of year.

Trapper maintains and transmits right to a delimited hunting territory exploited only by his family.

Mundurucu during the period immediately after the Mundurucu chief had ceased to act as intermediary with the trader. After the breakdown of extended kinship bonds in both groups, individuals traded completely on their own.

The native kinship organization persisted longer among the Mundurucu than among the Montagnais, and this has been a factor in perpetuating village life today among the less acculturated Indians east of the Tapajós River. Aboriginal Mundurucu kinship structure was more extensive and socially integrative than that of the Montagnais. Moreover, the aboriginal production of subsistence crops survives even among Mundurucu families living in isolation in their rubber avenues. The Mundurucu still produce all their own subsistence, although there are some changes in emphasis, technique, and organization.

The Brazilian rubber tapper--the white man who has gone into the forest or the Indian of mixed blood who is completely acculturated and enmeshed in the mercantile economy--usually buys all his food from the trader and devotes the season when he could be growing his own food to tapping rubber or to working off his debt to the trader by performing personal services. At present, we know of only one case of a Mundurucu who bought most of his food, but we can confidently predict that, as the population becomes more acculturated toward dependency in all ways upon the larger society, an ever-increasing number will buy food. When they are no longer able to feed themselves by their own efforts, they will have effectively become *caboclos*, or neo-Brazilian backwoodsmen.

The acculturative factors operated in two somewhat different ways among both the Mundurucu and Montagnais. First, they created a succession of modifications in the native societies, which gradually converged toward typological identity in the final family level. Second, during this evolution of the total groups they produced deviant families which broke away from their fellow tribesmen to devote themselves entirely to tapping or trapping. It was not until the processes had nearly reached their culmination that the surviving but greatly modified native society began to disintegrate.

Among the Mundurucu the bonds of leadership and kinship had undergone a steady and slow attrition during one hundred years. The end of warfare had robbed Mundurucu culture of a great deal of its vitality, and the chief was reduced to a mere figurehead, manipulated by the trader and the religious and governmental agencies. Work in the rubber avenues and dependence upon the trader had served to sever and weaken ties within the society. At the final point of transition to isolated residence, and total divorce from traditional communal life, the Mundurucu were not much more closely integrated than the Montagnais.

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577 different in kind, for the central theme
186 makes a sharp and conscious dichotomy
between desirable behavior within
Mundurucú society and toward the
outside world. These opposite aspects
of their dual ethic did not conflict but
served to reinforce each other and are
essential parts of an internally self-
consistent view of humanity.

648 The Mundurucú first came to the
[131] attention of colonial Brazil as a tribe
of dauntless warriors inhabiting the
forests and savannah country east of
the upper Tapajós River in the state
of Pará. Their reputation for unmiti-
gated ferocity and hostility towards
other Indian groups and white settlers
grew until 1795, when Brazil authori-
ties established peace with them and
diverted their energies into attacks on
tribes still unpacified. They achieved
considerable success in their service as
mercenaries, and by the end of the
nineteenth century, there were no hos-
tile Indians within hundreds of miles
[726] of Mundurucú territory. Mundurucú
warfare ended with the general pacifi-
cation of the region in the beginning of
this century, and they now pursue a
● [105] peaceful existence, hunting, tilling
their gardens, and collecting crude rub-
ber for sale to white traders.

181 Mundurucú warfare represents one
577 side of a dually oriented system of ethi-
cal values. If one is to view them from
this perspective, they appear, to use
the descriptive terminology followed
by Ruth Benedict, to be true Diony-
sians.² But the internal social order
stressed harmony, cooperation, and

² Ruth Benedict, *Patterns of Culture* (New
York, 1946).

797 had doubtless begun long before the establishment of the present mission; it
 771 is probable that items of Christian belief have diffused to the Mundurucú and
 been reinterpreted by them for a period of more than 150 years. These items
 of belief are now, from the viewpoint of the Indians, Mundurucú ideas. They
 recognize the affinity between Christian concepts and stories and some of their
 own, but they shrug off the former by saying that that is the way the priests
 tell the stories. Some informants thought that the priests had learned them
 from the Mundurucú—and learned them poorly.

The vast majority of Christian teachings have not, of course, been integrated
 into Mundurucú culture, and the Indians are exposed to these alien beliefs
 whenever they visit the mission or are visited by priests. Some of these, as the
 concepts of sin and damnation, are well known to the people, but make no
 emotional impact upon them. The idea of sin, especially original sin, is predi-
 cated upon the type of internalized authority more characteristic of the members
 of a complex society. Mundurucú social control is not dependent upon a sense
 of guilt, and the structure of personal relations is adequate to govern individuals.
 The Indians look upon this central theme of Christianity with mixed views. Some
 feel that hell is the particular destination of white people, but others barely
 bother to think about it at all. This summarizes the attitude of most Mundurucú
 toward missionary instruction. They rarely disbelieve the priests, for the latter
 are regarded as wise and sincere men. But their teachings are thought to be
 those of white men and thus to be true only for white men. There is no single
 and absolute body of unchangeable truth to the Mundurucú mind. Within their
 own mythology, for example, there are two separate origins of man; logically,
 this appears contradictory, but the Mundurucú do not put these beliefs to the
 test of logic. This statement does not imply that the Indians are illogical. Rather,
 it merely suggests that they, like most primitives, are not theologians. For this
 reason, the native and Christian beliefs coexist quite easily; but most Mundurucú
 have little interest in the latter, although they may not actively resist and reject
 them.

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CHANGES

178 Although it is doubtful that Christian proselytization has resulted in a large-
 174 scale displacement of native beliefs, the fact still remains that many aspects of
 105 Mundurucú religion are in full decline. This decadence is not understandable
 [77] as the result of a conflict of patterns of belief. Rather we must view religion,
 with Durkheim, as being in some way an expression of the mode of organization
 of the society. Also we are not concerned merely with belief, but with the closely
 connected subject of ritual; and the form of ritual is directly related to the
 structure of the social group that implements it.

With this thought in mind, we can review some of the major changes that
 have taken place in Mundurucú society since their contact with the whites.
 First, the Mundurucú were evidently patrilocal, as contrasted to their later
 matrilocality, until some time in the early nineteenth century.² This change in
 residence patterns revolutionized Mundurucú social structure. More than 40

² See Murphy (1956) for a full discussion of the causes and implications of this change.

Murphy: Mundurucú Religion

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patrilineal clans, ranked loosely into unnamed phratries and divided almost equally between exogamous moieties, persisted, but the residential basis of patrilineality disappeared. Males formerly remained in the house and village of their birth, but now they were dispersed by the new marriage rule. Clans lost their lineage nuclei and correspondingly suffered a loss of function. Bride service had in a sense become permanent, and the men's house, formerly the dwelling of village bachelors and young men in bride service, became a permanent dwelling of the men.

That is essentially the situation in the contemporary savannah villages. But the social organization of the Cururú River settlements marks a further change from the savannah pattern. Matrilocality is still rather vaguely regarded as the ideal residence rule for all but the sons of chiefs, and the custom is followed in a significant number of cases. Actually, however, many marriages are patrilocal, and there is an increasing tendency for couples to become neolocal eventually.

Furthermore, family life and the social division of the sexes has been drastically modified on the Cururú River. The Cururú villages are the result of migrations by nuclear and extended families from near-by savannah villages and do not represent the simultaneous moves of entire villages. The men's house was never instituted on the Cururú and dwellings were characteristically small. Thus, the Cururú River houses are the residences of one to three related families, whereas those on the savannahs, even under present conditions of depopulation, have an average number of about four families each. Men reside in the same houses as do their wives and children on the Cururú River, and the nuclear family approaches being an independent social and economic unit. Under these conditions the village has little cohesion, and recurrent factionalism results in the proliferation of new and smaller villages. Among these units there are individual ties of marriage and kinship, but the mission provides almost the only context in which the residents of different villages interact in a group."

Other factors have modified Mundurucú social structure and religion. The population is probably about one fourth of what it was 100 years ago;" this has resulted not only in greatly reduced villages and households, but it has decreased the number of shamans. Other influences have aggravated this decline. The end of warfare did much to devitalize the Mundurucú and to promote the growing disinterest in the native culture. It also eliminated a whole range of religious ceremonies that formed part of the head-hunting complex. Finally, there has been a profound shift in subsistence base among those Mundurucú who have moved to the shores of the Tapajós and Cururú rivers. In contrast to the savannah dwellers, who are vigorous hunters, these Indians depend primarily upon fish for protein. This has significance for the religious concepts and activities centered on the animal world and hunting.

"The respective social and economic organizations of savannah and Cururú River villages are compared and analyzed with reference to the ecology of rubber collection in another work. (Murphy, 1954.)

"According to some sources, this decline has been even greater. Martius (1867, p. 390) estimated the Mundurucú population to be 40,000 in 1819, and Tocantins (1877, p. 101) calculated their number to be 18,910 in 1875.

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KINSHIP AND MARRIAGE

of work performed and the added importance of the co-operative labor involved in farinha manufacture. This process, as has been described, calls for a division of tasks and a degree of organization among the women of a household. The latter, under the patrilocal rule, consisted of the wives of the lineage members, a group of women of diverse residential origins having no preëstablished ties of mutual accommodation and coöperation. The altered social system resulting from matrilocality, however, maintained the household group of sisters and their daughters and provided for the continuity of a female work group bonded by ties of kinship and within which the members were reared. The new-type household was thus better suited to its intensified role as a productive unit.¹⁵

To review the reconstruction of changes in Mundurucú clanship, reference to a period well before the contact of the tribe with the whites is necessary. It was hypothesized that the Mundurucú were at that time patrilineal and patrilocal and were undergoing population expansion. The clans may have been completely localized; they surely had large local nuclei. The pressure of growing population on resources resulted in the budding off of lineages from these local groups; these lineages became subclans and ultimately independent clans maintaining a phratric affiliation with the parent unit. The colonization of the Amazon Valley and the subsequent establishment of trade with the whites, in which farinha was exchanged for manufactured articles, may have so enhanced the importance of female

¹⁵ Eggan (1950, p. 131) states that the Hopi remained matrilocal despite the transfer of the major horticultural chores to the men because it was efficacious that the corn-grinding groups of related females be maintained. This presents a parallel to the hypothesized Mundurucú situation, although the Hopi pose a question of the maintenance of a pattern while the problem here is one of change. From either a causal or a functional viewpoint, however, the two cases support each other.

KINSHIP AND MARRIAGE

105 labor, in general, and the female work organization, in
174 particular, that extended families increasingly sought to
562 keep their daughters, even at the price of relinquishing the
614 sons. The result was a shift, probably gradual, to a matri-
local mode of residence.

105 This shift modified the nature of Mundurucú society,
174 and its further consequences will be developed in the
614 course of this chapter. The most immediate and obvious
change, however, was the destruction of the residential
basis of clanship through the dispersal upon marriage of
the men, who are the transmitters of membership. This can
be illustrated by the census of one village, which shows
that eleven clans are represented among nineteen men. In
a matrilineal and matrilineal system, men are also dis-
persed, but since descent is through females a co-resident
lineage having a core of clanswomen can be maintained.
This is not possible among the Mundurucú, for the patri-
lineal descent system places a daughter in a different clan
and the opposite moiety from those of her mother. Thus,
although the women are nucleated into clusters of blood
relatives, the clan membership of these units is also eclec-
tic.

614 The result of this fragmentation has been the severe
weakening of the clan as a functional social entity with
corporate prerogatives. In the hypothesized localized form,
the clan was a co-resident unit having important economic
and political characteristics. Its members were in every-
day interaction with each other, and bonds of clanship
were continuously manifested and exercised. Moreover, the
clan, through its possession of sacred musical instruments,
had ritual significance that is perpetuated into the present
only as empty form. Other than the continued nominal
ownership of the trumpets, clans, as social entities, have
few prerogatives. They bury the dead of certain clans of